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SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN ESTONIA AND LATVIA

Letter dated 30 December 1993 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of a statement dated 23 December 1993 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on the adoption by the Parliament of Latvia of a draft law on elections to local government bodies (see annex).

In view of the fact that in its resolution 48/155, "Situation of human rights in Estonia and Latvia", of 20 December 1993, the General Assembly requests you, Sir, "to keep Member States informed of the situation of human rights in Estonia and Latvia", I request you to have this letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under the agenda item entitled "Situation of human rights in Estonia and Latvia".

(Signed) Y. VORONTSOV

ANNEX

Statement dated 23 December 1993 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

As has become known, the Latvian Parliament, in spite of criticism within Latvia itself and from abroad, adopted in second reading a draft law on elections to local government bodies.

Under the draft law, non-nationals of the Republic of Latvia are being deprived of not only a passive, but also an active right to vote; language restrictions are being introduced even for nationals who are not of the indigenous nationality (only candidates who have passed the high-level Latvian-language examination will be able to stand for election); and barriers are being created (in practice - on the basis of nationality) for nominating candidates in Riga and the other major cities in the Republic where there is a high percentage of the non-indigenous population.

Thus, the Latvian members of Parliament have continued the policy of ignoring the recommendations by the experts of the Council of Europe and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, including the High Commissioner on questions relating to national minorities, Mr. Van der Stoel, who consider that it is inadmissible to prevent non-nationals who comprise a sizeable part of the population (hundreds of thousands of persons are involved here) from participating in local government.

The draft law of the Republic of Latvia on elections to local government bodies clearly demonstrates that drawing the attention of the international community to the situation of the non-indigenous population in Latvia is not "Russian propaganda", but is a real necessity. The resolution recently adopted at the General Assembly on the "situation of human rights in Estonia and Latvia" also confirms the existence in these countries of "unresolved issues that involve large groups of population of different ethnic origin".

Since there has been no response to Russia's position on the part of its partners in bilateral negotiations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation once again draws the attention of the world community and human-rights organizations to the escalating policy in Latvia of discriminating against and expelling the non-indigenous population, first and foremost the Russian-speaking population.

Before it is too late, all possible steps must be taken to ensure that aggressive nationalism - a danger for Europe which Russia has repeatedly warned of - does not flourish in the Baltic region.